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ABSTRACT

The emotional, social, intellectual, and physical needs of young people from 10 to 15 years old are being increasingly recognized in the schools, but the activities of these students after school are just beginning to be considered in terms of their effects on adolescents' academic and personal growth. Early in 1985, the University of North Carolina's Center for Early Adolescence embarked on a project titled "School Improvement and After-School Programs: Making the Connection." The center's staff members visited Detroit, Indianapolis, Louisville, Memphis, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and San Antonio to discuss with school administrators and community leaders the benefits and problems of existing or potential collaborative efforts between schools and community agencies. Although each district's attitude was unique, the researchers found agreement that schools and community agencies can work effectively together, that establishing connections between schools and after-school programs can foster middle-grade students' educational and social development, that collaborative efforts can help adolescents become contributing members of their communities, and that these programs can also bring parents into the schools. The greatest barriers to these efforts involved money, transportation, facility use and staffing, parent support, and coordination. Examples from the districts illustrate creative efforts to resolve these difficulties. (PGD)

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Promote "connections" for young adolescents

by Monica Jacoby

Emotionally, socially, intellectually, and physically, young adolescents are on a virtual roller coaster as they move toward adulthood in slips and starts. Growing and changing at different and unpredictable rates, these young people are both deeply dependent on adult authority, yet frequently resentful of that authority.

Increased attention is being given to the nature of schooling for these young adolescents—10 to 15 year olds (see p. 6). Schools cannot do the job alone, however.

Beyond the school day

Each day in school, young adolescents' intellectual and social growth is enabled and encouraged through education, instruction, contact with peers, and exposure to adults other than parents. But there is little data about the quality of young people's lives *after* school: Where do they go and what do they do once the dismissal bell rings, and how do their activities in those hours affect the growth fostered during the school day?

The dearth of information raises a compelling question for educators and school systems: Can after-school experiences be used to support and enrich classroom learning? In the same vein, is it possible to use after-school programming to instill in students a positive attitude toward school and academic achievement?

Making connections

For schools, the 1980s have been a time of retrenchment, a time to acknowledge that the public schools cannot solve every social problem. "Our business is education," say many educators.

At the same time, community agencies and youth-serving organizations that have been providing after-school activities for young people are facing shrinking budgets and rising costs of space, personnel, and liability insurance. The situation is one that cries loudly for schools and local agencies to collaborate in developing institutional connections. Early in 1985, the Center for Early Adolescence (University of North Carolina) embarked upon a project titled "School Improvement and After-School Programs: Making the Connection." Commissioned by the Ford Foundation, the project was designed as a "search mission."

Center staff members visited seven U.S. cities: Detroit; Indianapolis; Louisville; Memphis; Pittsburgh; St. Louis; and San Antonio. In each city, they discussed with school administrators and community leaders the benefits and problems of school/after-school connections and the impact collaborative efforts might have on middle-grade students' academic achievement and social development. Further, they explored the existing links, whether informal or institutionalized, that tie together the work of schools and local youth-serving agencies.

Discoveries

Although the levels of awareness and interest in school/after-school connections varied from city to city—as did their histories of school improvement, youth services, and leadership development—there were several common themes and points of general consensus that emerged.

- *By collaborating to provide enjoyable and meaningful after-school activities, schools and community agencies can work together to serve young people better.*

The concept is startling in its simplicity. Yet, one of the most telling results of the visits made for the "Connections" project was that they drew together people who recognize that they should, but usually do not, communicate with each other about the status of young adolescents in their communities. Working together, schools and community organizations often have the capability to support high quality after-school programs that neither entity could manage alone.

For example, schools can publicize community agencies' programs, distribute information on activities to young people and their parents, and allow agency staff to recruit program participants from school classes. And, to facilitate access to programs, schools can provide transportation to community programs instead of home, or allow local organizations to operate after-school programs in school buildings.

Community agencies can reciprocate by fostering community pride in and building support for schools. By honoring teachers, rewarding good report cards, maintaining study space, offering homework help, and communicating with teachers about students' progress, community-based after-school programs can encourage and support the work schools are doing.

- *Establishing connections between schools and after-school programs can encourage and foster middle-grade students' educational and social development.*

The vast majority of school and community leaders interviewed saw academic enrichment activities as an area

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especially well-suited for inclusion in after-school programming. By involving the efforts of both teachers and youth workers, connections that promote academic achievement and enhance learning can provide educational continuity, linking together material taught in class with complementary after-school activities.

There are possibilities for both intensive tutorial assistance and homework help. Also beneficial are less formalized activities such as academic games, field trips, and simulations that demonstrate the practical applications of what was learned in class.

Already, some communities that have implemented such programs have noted students' extended attention spans, happier attitudes toward school, and improved school attendance. Teachers also report evidence of more positive social behavior and the development of leadership skills.

- *By developing institutional connections, schools and community agencies can help young adolescents become contributing members of their communities in the after-school hours.*

Both school personnel and community leaders interviewed envisioned the possibility of work-study combinations for young adolescents: opportunities that would allow them to use the knowledge gained at school in a meaningful way, such as through cross-age tutoring or peer counseling. In some programs, the fact that young people are paid wages inspires responsibility, builds self-esteem, and gently introduces them to the realities of holding a job. Other opportunities for community involvement, such as volunteer work with the elderly, also are being developed.

In one city, a classroom project added a twist to intergenerational programming; nursing home residents, originally brought in to talk to classes, eventually began to offer a program of after-school tutoring services. In some communities, young people are an excellent resource for neighborhood preservation efforts, a natural tie-in with social studies, art, and other classwork.

- *School/after-school connections can draw parents into the schools.*

Parent involvement is an important by-product when after-school programs are housed in schools. When parents see schools helping to keep their children safe and engaged in meaningful activities after school, they become more supportive of schools.

The impetus for developing linkages involving parents can come from either the educational system or from the community. In one city, for example, community leaders suggested that their organizations' after-school programs offer parent education activities that teach parents how to help their children with homework and how to provide a learning environment at home. In another city, it is the school system that has proposed a similar idea.

Public support

School leaders are looking for ways to build increased public confidence and support of schools. Offering after-school programs for young people is one possible way to gain the support of working parents. Keeping young people off the streets after school also may earn the approval of older citizens who now vote against higher property taxes to fund schools.

Also, alliances to promote passage of bond referenda often include local business leaders; they realize that new industry is attracted to cities with successful schools, and know that schools will help to determine the quality of their own future employees. Every city visited for the "Connection" project had some form of a partners-in-education program involving business and industry. These partnerships also frame opportunities for greater articulation between school and community during the school day and after school.

Barriers to connections

Discussions with school and community leaders revealed several barriers to making connections. Although these vary among cities—and sometimes on a neighborhood to neighborhood basis—there are five areas that were routinely mentioned as being problematic: money; transportation; facility use and staffing; parent support; and coordination. In many instances, cooperative efforts have led to creative solutions to overcoming these barriers.

Money. Lack of funding for extracurricular activities for middle-grade students hinders efforts to develop connections between schools and after-school programs. The costs of keeping buildings lighted, heated, secure, and insured are high; they increase dramatically as overtime wages for building engineers and custodial staff are added.

In most cases, no money is available to pay teachers, community agency staff, and others who would provide after-school services. And, although it may be possible to obtain "seed money" for pilot projects, continued funding generally is unavailable. There is a pressing need for *new* money; neither the schools nor the community agencies are able to allocate funds from their tightly stretched budgets.

Despite these difficulties, many schools and communities are becoming increasingly commited to obtaining funding for after-school programs. In Indianapolis, for example, the funding for programs that serve thousands of middle-grade students comes from a diverse mix of sources including the school system, local agencies, businesses, religious organizations, foundations, participant fees, and private contributors.

Also, schools and agencies have overcome some monetary problems by splitting the costs and responsibilities for after-school programs. The parks and recreation department, for example, is required to pay only an hourly wage for custodians during the time it uses school buildings; rent and utilities are absorbed by the school system. To reciprocate, the department transports young people from school pick-up points to additional activity sites in the area.

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Transportation. Neighborhood schools are disappearing. Community facilities often are not located in areas served by existing school bus routes. Most young people attending after-school activities, therefore, will require transporation to programs and/or to home. Also, inadequate transportation services may affect some students more than others, thus raising the issue of equity.

To solve the transportation problem, some schools seek additional funding for late buses. Others redesign bus routes to pass by community-based program sites. Building the cost of transportation into program registration fees is yet another option.

Indianapolis is addressing the transportation problem in two ways. When students must spend more than an hour riding the bus, youth leaders conduct programs on board the buses as they roll home. For other areas, an effort is underway to involve the public transportation system in providing service to youth in the after-school hours.

Facility use and staffing. Although many people see schools as ideal facilities for after-school programs, liability and security concerns often force principals to decline. Or, even if access is permitted, costs for building rental and custodial services frequently are prohibitive.

Much the same is true for staffing. School officials who do not want nonschool employees to use school facilities have had teachers lead after-school programs. Too often, however, teacher complaints about an extended workday and students' complaints about activities being "more school" are the result.

Nevertheless, some schools *do* manage to open their doors for after-school activites; other facilities, such as public libraries, churches, museums, and local parks also are willing to provide space. There are teachers who are happy to work with young people after school, as are professional youth workers, social service volunteers, and even older teens. Often, responsibilities for facility provision and staffing can be divided among schools, agencies, and other organizations so that no single entity is overburdened.

For example, in St. Louis, community school programs operate in 15 public schools (mostly middle-grade schools) throughout the city. The program receives partial funding from the school board, which subsidizes a full-time coordinator at each site; staffing is provided by parks and recreation youth workers.

What young adolescents need

Research has shown that young adolescents need school *and* nonschool environments that provide:

- structure and clear limits;
- opportunities for positive social interaction with peers and adults;
- opportunities to display competence and achievement;
- opportunities to participate meaningfully in school and community;
- outlets for physical activity, creative expression, and self-definition.

Parent support. Both educators and community leaders see the reluctance of parents to support school and community efforts as a barrier to connections. Many parents believe that, once their children reach age 11 or 12 (or in some cases, seven or eight), they no longer require adult supervision after school. But the young adolescent—the 10 to 15-year-old who is too old for day care but too young for paid employment—as "latch-key child" has been overlooked; the focus has been on the elementary-age children of working parents. Public attention usually turns to these adolescents, however, when rates of anti-social behavior rise.

Some parents have no alternative to using their young adolescents as care providers for younger siblings. Unless there are activities for younger children as well, these young teens cannot participate in after-school programs.

Parent education programs designed to help parents see the benefits of after-school activities are beginning to surface as joint school/community agency initiatives. Educators and youth serving professionals want to teach parents how to help their children improve school performance, how to communicate more effectively with them, and how to understand and encourage normal, healthy early adolescent development.

An example of a program striving to do this is a collaborative venture at Detroit's Edmonson School. Involving professionals from Wayne State University and the school system, the program emphasizes academic enrichment and helps low-income, single parents obtain counseling, job training, and assistance in supporting their children's healthy development. As a result, parents have been loyal to the program, turning out in force for events in which their children are involved.

Coordination. In most areas, there is a serious lack of coordination between schools and community agencies that adversely affects the success of school/after-school connections. School administrators and educators often have little, if any, idea of what youth-serving agencies in their communities are doing for teens in the after-school hours. Conversely, agency staff report that they have little information from the schools regarding the youth they serve.

The Center for Early Adolescence report on "making the connection," authored by Leah Lefstein, includes a telling illustration of the need for communication and coordination: A note from a mother to her son's teacher stated, "Dear Teacher, Please don't keep Johnny after school again today. He has to go to the Boys Club to learn to read."

For reciprocal institutional connections to succeed, schools and local organizations need to develop new mechanisms for communicating and sharing information. Key school and community leaders need to talk—frequently and consistently—about their efforts, their problems with the young people they serve, and their ideas about what to do next week and next year.

In some cities, discussion participants suggested that hiring an individual to be responsibile for ensuring coordination and implementing plans would be a good idea. In other cities, those interviewed recommended that these functions be built into the job descriptions of school assistant principals and agency staff members.

Critical need

Connections that will link learning during the school day with meaningful opportunities for educational and social growth in the after-school hours warrant the attention and efforts of those who are concerned about the healthy development of young adolescents. Emphasizing the critical need for such connections and creating the climate for nurturing them are visible opportunities for school board leadership. ■

Portions of this article have appeared previously in "Making the Connection," by Leah Lefstein, in TEAM, *Nov., 1986, and in "School Improvement and After-School Programs: Making the Connection," by Monica Jacoby in* Middle School Journal, *Nov., 1986.*